

THE PLANNING PORTAL, CLG

Client interview with Chris Kendall, Director

The Planning Portal is provided by Communities and Local Government to be the first port of call for planning and building information and services online. The Portal provides products and services to deliver tangible and meaningful benefits to all users of the planning system including citizens, business and every Local Planning Authority (LPA) in England and Wales

THE CHALLENGE - TO SETUP A NATIONAL DATABASE

“The Government had consistently urged local planning authorities to take a tough line on illegal roadside adverts which were considered to be both unsightly and dangerous” says Chris.

“In December, 2005 CLG announced plans to launch a national database containing information on companies who advertise illegally beside motorways in a bid to assist local planning authorities in enforcing the law.”

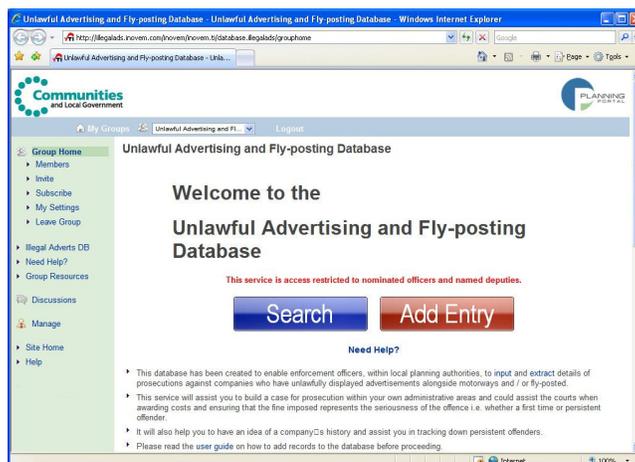
At the time planning minister, Yvette Cooper, said: “Many of these ads are dangerous as well as being an eyesore. It is time local authorities clamped down.”

English Heritage had highlighted the problem in the urban landscape in its March 2000 publication, Streets for All, focusing on gable-end advertising hoardings which ‘disfigure buildings, blight the environment and retard economic regeneration by fostering a feeling of transience and decline.’

Chris added “Companies and landowners involved with adverts displayed in contravention of the existing planning regulations are open to prosecution. On conviction parties can face fines of up to £2,500 for the offence as well as daily fines of £250 for each day the offending advert remains in place.

“Knowing whether a company was a first-time or a persistent offender would enable the fine imposed to reflect the seriousness of the offence. Repeat offenders will be monitored and penalised accordingly.

“The need was for a national database allowing local planning authority enforcement officers to track offenders. The information from other LPAs across the country will help them to build a case for prosecution within their own areas by



providing background to a company's illegal advertising history and helping them to track down persistent offenders."

The information contained on the database could then assist the courts when they award costs.

PROVIDING A SECURE ENVIRONMENT FOR SHARED COMMUNICATIONS

Communities and Local Government funded the development of the Unlawful Advertising and Fly-Posting Database which could be accessed electronically.

The platform used to support the database needed to facilitate online collaboration and consultation between local planning authorities.

"We also needed a method to restrict access to the database service to nominated officers and named deputies at local authorities with .gov.uk email addresses.

"The database had to allow local authority enforcement officers to input details of prosecutions against companies who have illegally displayed advertisements in their area along with a description of the offence and details of the judgement.

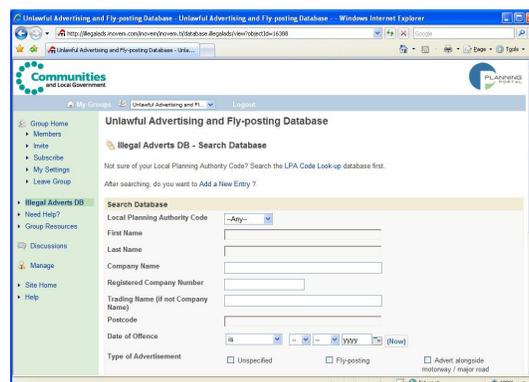
"We required the facility to notify members every time a new entry is made to the database and allow them to search the database to build a case for enforcement action against persistent offender." explains Chris.

WHY THE PLANNING PORTAL CHOSE INOVEM

"We needed to create a collaborative workspace and a database of convictions to enable local authority enforcement officers to communicate and share experience and information", says Chris.

"The database was developed with their specific needs in mind following extensive consultation and testing and embodies the aims of the Gershon report which seeks to derive efficiencies for all involved in the planning process and encourage the sharing of best practice across government."

Chris pointed out "Having previously worked with INOVEM on other projects we were aware of their capabilities and their ability to roll-out solutions quickly and efficiently."



BUILDING ON PREVIOUS SUCCESSES

The Planning Portal has a number of deployments of the INOVEM Inclusionware in operation. Primarily it has been used on mission critical product development including the Standard National Planning Application Form, where the tool was used as a collaborative environment with multiple stakeholders, and the E-consultation Hub, a large national project aimed at making consultation on planning applications quicker, more

effective and transparent.

“INOVEM have consistently supplied support and consultancy both on technical issues and on the practical matters of developing thriving, effective communities.

“INOVEM were extremely helpful and understood our requirements very quickly against a tight timetable. Despite this they were able to deliver a solution that fully delivered against our objectives for usability and security and at very reasonable cost”, stated Chris.

RESULTS ACHIEVED TO DATE

The service went live in March 2007 and now has more than 300 members from 195 local authorities across the country.

“We believe the service has contributed significantly to the decline in numbers of illegal roadside adverts particularly alongside motorways. This has met our commitment to the Minister and improved the safety and appearance of our roads.

“In addition the solution has, through its discussion facility, enabled enforcement officers to share expertise and information in a way that was previously impossible.” remarked Chris Kendall, the Director of the Planning Portal

Feedback from planning officers has been equally positive.

Mark Dickens, Development Services Manager at St Helens Council, said:

“We regularly use the Unlawful Advertising Database as a tool for sourcing information on how to proceed with cases for example on case law and clarification of the regulations. It has assisted us with providing a more efficient and effective service and allowed us to tackle this particular issue in a more informed manner.

“The database is a facility that we would recommend to all other LPAs as it provides a central location for all the relevant information that they would need.”

WHERE NEXT?

This experience is influencing the way we communicate with our stakeholders. The solution offers a more interactive experience that will enable our users to have a say in the way our service develops. The ease of use, reasonable cost and speed of deployment offer a very workable tool that is likely to be a part of our communication armoury for some time.

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LET'S GET TOGETHER

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